



National Environmental  
Laboratory Accreditation  
Conference

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# NELAC OPERATING POLICIES

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## INTRODUCTION

The Board of Directors for the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) occasionally issues policies regarding the operation of its committees and related matters. Such policies are developed after careful deliberation and only when necessary to ensure the smooth operation of NELAC. NELAC Committees are encouraged to apply the policies. This compilation contains policies issued through January 27, 1999.

For information or clarification, contact the NELAC Executive Secretary at (202) 564-6830.

## **Policy on Conducting Committee Meetings**

The NELAC process is based on a partnership of the federal and state governments, which encourages input from the private sector. The committee meetings are critical elements of NELAC, as it is during these meetings that the majority of the work is done. The following procedures are designed to assure that all meetings are conducted in an equal, fair, and open manner.

1. The committee chair will be responsible for notifying the NELAC Executive Secretary of all upcoming meeting, including teleconferences.
2. The Executive Secretary will publish the meeting information on the OAQPS electronic bulletin board service (BBS).
3. Teleconferences lines are not usually provided for other than committee members. However, if a Voting Member or Contributor, not currently serving on the committee, wishes to participate, the committee chair should attempt to make arrangements for that person(s) to join one of the participating committee members.
4. Agendas for the meeting should be distributed prior to the meeting for comments, additions, and corrections. Any deviations from the agenda must be agreed to by a simple majority of the committee. The minutes of the meeting should reflect the reason for the deviation.
5. Written comments must be addressed by the committee before the national (Interim or Annual Meetings) meetings. If the response to a comment is not addressed in the minutes, a brief summary of the comment and response should be provided in an attachment. Similar comments received from multiple sources may be combined to avoid unnecessary repetition. Response to any comments received less than thirty (30) days before a national meeting may be postponed for consideration until after the national meeting.
6. During the national meetings the committee chair shall provide ample time for comment from all attendees. It is the responsibility of the chair to assure that time for comment is allocated equitably among all attendees.
7. No attendee shall be invited to join the committee at the head table.
8. Any presentations by a committee member or an attendee must be approved by the committee prior to the meeting. Those extending beyond 3-4 minutes must also receive prior approval of the Committee Chair.
9. The chair is responsible for maintaining order and will assess the relevancy of comments to the committee's charge. Those comments which are not germane will be referred to the appropriate forum.
10. During national meetings, nomination forms should be available for potential new or replacement members.
11. The chair is encouraged to recognize special contributions, acknowledge the efforts of committee members, and extend appreciation to any attendees.

## **Policy on Standards Publication**

The accurate and timely publication of the standards for the NELAC annual and interim meetings is the key element for a productive meeting. The best discussions will result if the Voting Members and the Contributors are fully informed and have the opportunity to review the standards sufficiently ahead of the meetings to develop their positions and prepare cognizant arguments before discussions begin in the committee sessions. The following procedures are designed to assure that the standards reflect committee decisions and that the standards are published within the established deadlines.

1. The committee chair is responsible for contacting the NELAC Executive Secretary to request support to maintain the current version of the standards.
2. All standards published for the interim and annual meetings are to be prepared in the designated format. The support staff will supply the chair with the needed format if necessary.
3. The support staff shall make revisions to the document as specified during committee meetings. The time for the support staff to make the changes is dependent on the extent of the revisions. In no case will this exceed seven days.
4. Drafts will be sent by fax to the chair. *NOTE: If the chair is unavailable, one of the committee members should be selected as an alternate reviewer. The support staff must be notified by the chair, preferably during the meeting, if the document is to be sent to the alternate.*
5. The chair must return comments to the support staff within five days of receipt of the faxed document.
6. Revision numbers reflect the versions distributed at the interim and annual meetings only. Any revisions which are generated solely for committee review shall not have an official revision number, i.e. in the document control header of the standard, the revision number shall not change except for new versions published for an interim or annual meeting. Each committee may choose any suitable method to indicate the internal committee revisions, e.g. Revision 3-A or Revision 3-ii.
7. All revisions for interim or annual meetings must be provided in final form to the NELAC Director and Executive Secretary 45 days prior to the first day of the meeting. The chair shall assure that the copy provided by the support staff reflects all the changes made in the committee meetings.
8. The NELAC Director shall post the standards on the NELAC Bulletin Board 30 days prior to the interim or annual meeting.
9. Any substantive corrections to the standards, after they are posted on the Bulletin Board, shall be limited to a maximum of two pages. These changes must be provided to the NELAC Director and Executive Secretary at least 7 days before the meeting. Simple editorial changes are allowed at any time, including during committee sessions at the annual and interim meetings.

## **Policy on Facilitation at Interim and Annual Meetings**

An orderly and efficient committee meeting will assure that the time and efforts of all participants, both Voting Members and Contributors, are well spent. In order for the chair to focus on the substantive issues and technical concerns, support will be provided to facilitate the committee sessions. The following procedures are designed to assure that the role of each party is clear and that the chair has the needed support.

1. The committee chair will be responsible for contacting the NELAC Executive Secretary to request facilitation support for meetings.
2. The Executive Secretary will assign facilitation staff to attend each Standing Committee meeting to record the minutes and to serve as a facilitator.
3. Each chair is responsible to meet with the committee's assigned facilitator preceding the committee session. During this meeting the chair is to outline the sections to be discussed, review the agenda, and set the time line for discussion.
4. The chair is responsible for opening and closing the session, redirecting discussions, explaining the intent of the standards, and determining the response to comments and suggestions, including the need for a formal vote. The chair may, at any time, assume control of the meeting if the facilitator is impeding the progress of the committee.
5. The facilitator, following the directions of the chair, will lead the group through the relevant sections of the agenda. The facilitator will be responsible for tracking those members of the audience who wish to participate, maintaining any time limits necessary, identifying editorial comments (see Policy 6), and directing the dialogue between the audience and the committee members. The facilitator will not attempt to respond to comments nor interpret the standards.
6. Editorial comments can be taken at any time, but it is suggested they be submitted in written form for consideration before the next annual or interim meeting. The facilitator will request that editorial comments be submitted in writing and delivered to the chair. These comments may be evaluated before the conclusion of the committee session, if the chair determines that all other substantive issues have been addressed. The facilitator will lead the discussion on editorial comments.
7. Final decisions on all issues will be made by the committee Voting Members. Contributors on the committee will not vote, however, they are expected to indicate their support or opposition to the issues at hand. It is expected that most issues will be resolved by the chair. Committee members, including Contributors, have an obligation to voice their opinions if they differ from the chair's presentation of the committee's position. In some cases, it may be necessary to take a formal vote.

## **Policy on Primary Responsibility for Standards**

Each standing committee addresses a specific area of accreditation. However, there are many overlaps among the committees on certain issues. One of the primary goals of NELAC is to eliminate duplication and potential conflict among the standards, both internally and as implemented by the accrediting authorities. The following procedures are designed to assure that the standards are consistent among themselves and that revisions in one standard do not render sections of other standards obsolete.

1. Each committee chair should identify those portions of his or her committee's standards which contain information that is the primary responsibility of another standing committee.
2. Each committee chair should review all other standards to assure that other the standards do not contain pertinent information, which would affect their own committee's standards.
3. Committee chairs may request support personnel from the NELAC Executive Secretary to assist in these tasks. (Support will be dependent on available resources.)
4. Any disputes on the proper committee location of specific issues should be resolved between committee chairs. In the case of unresolved disputes the NELAC Director and Chair will serve as mediators.
5. Committees standards should reference the appropriate standard for specifics on issues which are the primary responsibility of another committee. In this way, any changes in a standard by one committee will be automatically accommodated in any other committee which needs to refer to that specific issue.
6. Direct quotes are not recommended because of the possibility of obsolescence in the case of changes. If a direct quote is deemed necessary to a complete understanding of some section of the standard, a written record should be kept by the chairs of the affected committees. In this way, if the committee with primary responsibility makes any changes to that section, there will be a flag to notify any committee which has quoted that section. Both, or all, committees must assure that their voting agendas at the Annual Meeting reflect the proposed changes.

## **Policy on Revision of Standards**

The purpose of this policy is to define those conditions under which established NELAC standards may be considered by Standing Committees for revision. No NELAC standard should ever be considered final, and standards must be able to be revised as needed. However, the process leading to adoption of a NELAC standard is very thorough. Following the presentation of a proposed standard by a standing committee, every interested governmental and non-governmental stakeholder has the opportunity to comment on the proposal, either verbally or in writing, and has the opportunity to debate the proposed standard in working sessions at the Interim and Annual Meetings. Only then is it presented for vote. Thus, every standard is the result of the collective wisdom of the NELAC stakeholders.

Standards must have a certain stability over time, and a mechanism is required to prevent arbitrary reopening of consideration of a standard when no new information or argument is forthcoming. In order to ensure that the adoption and implementation of the standards are not disrupted by constant changes, the following procedures are designed to assure that revisions to the standards are appropriate and needed:

1. Under normal circumstances, any portion of a standard will not be eligible for revision for three (3) years after the date of its adoption; e.g., portions of a standard modified, appended, deleted, etc., at the 1997 Annual Meeting would not be eligible for revision until the 2000 Annual Meeting.
2. A standing committee should propose changes, however, if at least one of the following requirements has been met:
  - ▶ Information that was previously unavailable, and which could impact the standard, has been presented; e.g., new data are available to show that reducing the rigor of the standard would not result in unacceptable lowering of quality.
  - ▶ There has been a change in EPA statute or regulation, which renders the standard inconsistent with the revised statute or regulation.
  - ▶ The scope of NELAC has changed, requiring extension or reduction of the scope of the standard.
3. During the initial phase of implementation, there will likely be some issues that are untenable, duplicative, etc. Since it is important that these types of issues be addressed as expeditiously as possible, the Board of Directors will consider exceptions to the policy in item 1 above. The committee chairs are responsible for providing, as soon as the committee has agreed that a change is needed, but no later than 60 days prior to the Annual Meeting, the proposed changes with justification, detailing the current problem, its urgency, and the manner in which the remedy will resolve the situation.



4. Committees are allowed and encouraged to consider editorial changes at any time. However, revisions should only be presented for a vote once the three (3) year time frame is met.
5. Each committee chair is responsible to convey to the committee members and attendees at the Annual and Interim Meetings, the restrictions on amendment of standards outlined in this policy.

## **Policy on Committee Membership**

NELAC will benefit if committee membership presents the greatest possible input from both the private sector and the government participants. It is in the best interests of all to expand the base of information and perspectives. The following procedures are designed to assure that the selection process for new committee members and contributors is uniform across committees and reflects the desire to incorporate as many different perspectives as possible.

1. Nomination forms for committee participation will be available on the Bulletin Board Service (BBS) and will be provided at all NELAC Annual and Interim Meetings. Completed forms will be distributed to the appropriate committee chairs. It is highly recommended, but not mandatory, to have a nomination form for each potential committee participant.
2. The committee chair is responsible for initiating the selection process and requesting the NELAC Chair to appoint all members and contributors.
3. The committee chair is to attempt to balance the voting membership to the degree possible, taking the following into consideration:  
Voting Members
  - no concurrent members from the same state, federal agency, or EPA Office/Region;
  - type of state/federal program, e.g., drinking water only, comprehensive program covering water, waste, air, etc.;
  - size of state; and
  - geographic distribution.
4. The committee chair should select contributors based on their particular merits, experience, knowledge, etc. of the individual. In no way should the combination of contributors be used to develop consensus advice. Any individual may be solicited to provide advice and comments. Consensus advice can only be solicited through the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board, chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The chair should consider the following factors when seeking Contributors for input to the committee:  
Contributors\*
  - no concurrent contributors from the same company or organization;
  - affiliation, e.g. laboratory, local government, industry, etc.
  - size of organization; and
  - geographic distribution.
5. To the extent possible the committee chair shall select individuals from different agencies or organizations than those represented on the other committees. The NELAC Chair, upon reviewing the nominations from all committees, will make a judgement on the appropriateness of the selections on an overall basis.
6. When an individual resigns during his or her term of office, the committee chair may nominate another individual from the same organization as a replacement for the duration of the term.

7. Nominees for the routine rotational appointments should be selected from organizations or agencies other than those represented by the exiting voting member or contributor.
8. Any voting member or contributor who has served on a committee shall be eligible to serve on another committee once he or she has resigned from the committee or completed his or her term on the committee. A member of the Nominating Committee may serve concurrently on another committee.
9. A written request must be submitted to the Board of Directors for any exceptions to these guidelines.
10. Board members will not serve concurrently on a committee. Board members will be requested to contact each of the committees to serve as liaison between the Board and the committee.
11. During the first five years of the operation of any standing committee, membership shall be staggered. Since all members' terms started on the same date, it is necessary that some committee members serve less than a full term. At least one contributor and one voting member must rotate off the committee each year.
12. During the first three years of the operation of any administrative committee, membership, other than the Nominating Committee, shall be staggered. Since all members' terms started on the same date, it is necessary that some committee members serve less than a full term. At the end of the second year, a total of three contributor and three voting members must rotate off the committee, with a minimum of one contributor and one voting member in any one year.
13. These staggered rotations may be accomplished by natural attrition due to resignation of one or more individuals, by requesting volunteers to rotate off the committee, or any other method that the chair deems equitable.

## **Policy on Meeting Minutes**

It is in the best interests of all to post accurate minutes of all meetings with the shortest possible delay. The following procedures are designed to assure that adequate support is supplied to the committee chairs, sufficient feedback is provided, and responses are given in a timely manner.

1. The committee chair will be responsible for contacting the NELAC Executive Secretary to request support for meetings.
2. The Executive Secretary will assign suitable support staff to attend each committee meeting and to serve as the recorder.
3. In the case of a one-day (or less) meeting, the recorder will prepare an initial draft for the chair's review within three days following the meeting. For each additional meeting day, the recorder will have one additional day to prepare the initial draft.
4. Drafts will be sent by fax to the chair. *NOTE: If the chair is unavailable, one of the committee members should be selected as an alternate reviewer. The recorder must be notified by the chair, preferably during the meeting, if the document is to be sent to the alternate.*
5. The chair must return comments to the recorder within two days of receipt of the faxed document.
6. The recorder will supply the draft minutes to the Executive Secretary within two days of receipt of the chair's (or alternates) comments. In the case of major additions by the committee chair, sufficient time will be allotted to allow the recorder to collect the needed information.
7. Before meeting minutes are posted on the Web page, the Executive Secretary will review the minutes and discuss any necessary changes with the chair of the committee (or designated alternate).
7. The Executive Secretary will send the final minutes to the chair (preferably by e-mail) and post the minutes on the Web page simultaneously.
9. Each committee meeting should commence with a review of the minutes of the preceding meeting. If the committee members note any changes or additions to the minutes of the preceding meeting, the minutes of said meeting should detail those changes.

## **Policy on Participation on the Board of Directors and Committees**

The purpose of this policy is to assure that committees are well served by the members appointed to them. Upon appointment, a new Board or committee member shall be informed of the duration of the appointment and be given a copy of this policy.

1. A member may be removed by the Board or committee chair at any time for:
  - (1) for cause, after notice and hearing before the Board of Directors,
  - (2) after missing three consecutive meetings (including teleconferences), or
  - (3) after missing more than 30% of the meetings within any 6 month period.
2. The chair of the Board or affected committee shall inform the NELAC Executive Secretary when it is deemed necessary to take action regarding the status of any committee/Board member.
3. In the case of a member being removed for cause, the member must be notified in writing and a hearing scheduled with the Board at either one of the regularly scheduled meetings or a special meeting.
4. In the case of a member missing three consecutive meetings, after the second consecutive missed meeting and (preferably two weeks) before the next meeting, the chair shall notify the member in writing that the member may be removed for missing the next meeting. The chair has the prerogative to excuse absences based on the circumstances of an individual member, e.g., illness, vacation, travel.
5. In the case of a member missing more than 30% of the meetings in any 6 month period, the chair shall notify the member in writing at least two weeks prior to the next meeting. In determining the 30% absence rate, there must be at least four meetings scheduled in any 6 month period.
6. In the case of a vacancy, the chair shall nominate a person to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term in compliance with the Policy on Committee Membership (Policy 6).

## **Policy on Verification of NELAC Credentials**

Verification of credentials of all voting members is needed to insure that they meet the qualifications as described in the NELAC Constitution and Bylaws, Article VII, Sections 1 and 2. The organizations listed in the Constitution and Bylaws as qualifying an individual for Voting Membership are hereafter referred to as “NELAC government bodies”. There is no requirement for verification of credentials at the NELAC Interim Meetings or Special Meetings as defined in the NELAC Constitution and Bylaws.

**House of Representatives:** Members of the House of Representatives are specifically appointed by the head of their NELAC government body. The process to solicit such appointments and confirm qualifications are described below.

1. The NELAC Membership and Outreach Committee provides a letter soliciting participation in the House of Representatives for distribution by the NELAC Chair to the head of each NELAC government body.
2. If the government body does not appoint a new representative, NELAP maintains the name of last year’s designated representative on the list of current Representatives.
3. If the government body designates a new Representative, NELAP enters the individual’s name on the list of current Representatives.
4. If the NELAC government body permits an alternate Representative as indicated in its response, and the designated representative has informed the Director of the substitution of his/her alternate, NELAP enters the alternate’s name on the list of current Representatives, indicating that the individual is an alternate for the designated representative.
5. NELAP maintains all letters and records of communication concerning the appointment of Representatives in a central file.
6. As individuals register for the Annual Meeting, NELAC registration personnel will check the registration form against the list of Representatives to confirm that the appointment is noted and the additional qualification, that of program affiliation, is checked.
7. At the Annual Meeting, the NELAC registration personnel will issue a badge to the qualified individual, indicating his/her status as a member of the House of Representatives.

**House of Delegates:** Membership to the House of Delegates is open to all other qualified officials of any NELAC government body.

1. Upon registration for the Annual Meeting, NELAC registration personnel will check the individual's stated affiliations, NELAC government body, and program.
2. If the qualified individual is not a member of the House of Representatives, NELAC registration personnel will issue the individual a badge designating his/her status as a member of the House of Delegates.

## **Policy on Board Liaison to Committees**

The purpose of this policy is to describe the relationship between the Board of Directors, NELAC, and the Committees required and permitted by the Conference Bylaws. It is not the intent of this policy to circumvent correspondence between committee chairs and the Board of Directors, or to have the liaison determine which issues are Board-relevant or not. The duties of the liaison are twofold: to inform the Board, on an *ad hoc* basis, of the committee activities; and to counsel the committee chair on Board policy, where appropriate. Serving as liaison can be a positive experience for both the Board member and the committee, through dialogue and understanding of each groups' roles and responsibilities.

1. The Chair of the NELAC will appoint a Board of Directors member to each of the administrative, standing and special committees, except the Nominating Committee.
2. The Chair of the NELAC will consider the wishes of the Committee Chair and the individual Board Members interest when appointing the liaison.
3. It is the responsibility of the liaison to attend committee meetings as deemed appropriate through consultation with the Committee Chair, and to keep informed of the Committee's actions and deliberations.
4. It is the responsibility of the Committee Chair to add the Board Member to the committee information distribution list, whether electronic or hardcopy.
5. The liaison will not participate in the committee deliberations unless asked, and will inform the Board of Directors of issues on request.
6. Interim or deliberative comments and positions will not be disclosed due to the possibility of misinterpretation.